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ABSTRACT

Mentoring is being embraced by many schools as a way to fill gaps in the lives of children classified as "at-risk." Several lines of research indicate that mentoring programs encouraging positive adult relationships with these students provide the support needed to help these children reach their full potential. Through a collaborative effort between Rodriguez Elementary School, located in inner city San Antonio (Texas), and Our Lady of the Lake University, also in San Antonio, a very successful mentoring program involving college students and elementary school students is underway. As part of a state grant, a research program accompanied the mentoring program. By 1993-94, the program had grown to include over 130 college students, providing mentors for many of the school's 370 students. Using a one-group pretest-posttest design, the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale was administered to elementary students involved in the mentoring program. While the results were not statistically significant, the data indicate a positive trend in students' self-concept and also indicate that the collaborative mentoring program is having a positive effect on students' self-esteem. (Contains one table and four references.) (Author/SLD)

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M[illegible]oring: A School-University Partnership That Is Making A Difference

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Abstract

Mentoring is being embraced by many schools as a way to fill huge gaps in the lives of children classified as "at-risk". Based on several lines of research, mentoring programs encouraging positive adult relationships with these students provide support and encouragement needed to help these children reach their full potential. Through a collaborative effort between Rodriguez Elementary School and Our Lady of the Lake University, a very successful mentoring program involving college students and elementary students in underway. As part of a state grant, a research project accompanied the mentoring program. Using a one group pretest-posttest design, the Piers-Harris Children's Self Concept Scale was administered to elementary students involved in the mentoring program. While the results were not statistically significant, the data indicates a positive trend in students' self-concept and also indicates that the collaborative mentoring program is having a positive effect on the students' self-esteem.

Mentoring: A School-University Partnership That is Making A Difference

Mentoring has become a hot topic in education these past few years. It is an old idea that is resurfacing vigorously to address the unprecedented needs of today's students in American schools. As a result of changes occurring in society and the character of American families, especially the increase of single-parent families, the involvement of parents in the lives and education of their children has decreased dramatically over the past twenty years. In search for solutions to address the problems arising from a wide variation in the duration, frequency and intensity of adult contacts in the lives of children, schools are being charged with the responsibility of providing positive role models for students who are lacking support, guidance and assistance from caring adults. The question is, how can schools best address the needs of these students?

Attempts to answer this question have lead to the establishment of school partnerships with businesses, universities, professional groups, and service organizations to provide mentoring for students who need a caring role model. Mentoring is a powerful way to provide adult contacts for children. While these programs take many different forms, a common thread running throughout all programs is the goal of developing a supportive relationship between a student and an adult to improve the student's self-esteem, attitudes and achievement. Based on several lines of research, mentoring programs encouraging positive adult relationships with students provide the support and encouragement needed to help children reach their full potential (Weinberger, 1992).

Mentoring and At-Risk Students

Mentoring is being embraced by many schools as a way to fill huge gaps in the lives of children identified as "at risk". Planned mentoring programs provide opportunities for these students to identify with their mentors as positive adult role model. Education programs involving mentoring for at-risk students seem to bolster the mentee's sense of

competence and self-concept (Alleman, Cochran, Doverspike, & Newman, 1984, Slicker & Palmer, 1993; Kaufman, Harrel, Milam, Wooverton, & Miller, 1986).

The Rodriguez Elementary Mentoring Program

The Rodriguez Elementary Mentoring Program began in 1992 as the result of a collaborative effort between Rodriguez Elementary School and Our Lady of the Lake University (OLLU) in San Antonio. With the aid of a state grant awarded to six schools in the San Antonio Independent School District classified as "at risk" schools, Rodriguez Elementary and Our Lady of the Lake University were able to join forces in an attempt to make a difference in the lives of the young children attending Rodriguez Elementary. This very successful mentoring program involves the matching of college students and at-risk elementary students in order to improve the elementary student's attitudes, behavior and self-esteem.

Rodriguez Elementary School is classified by the Texas Education Agency as an "at-risk" school. This means that an overwhelming number of students attending the school are at risk for failure. Rodriguez Elementary School, located in inter-city San Antonio, has a total student population of approximately 370 students with an ethnic make-up that is 99.2% Hispanic. The grade levels in the school range from prekindergarten to fifth grade with 98.9 % of these students eligible for the free lunch or reduced lunch programs and 42% of these students involved in the Chapter 1 or special education programs. Rodriguez Elementary has also been designated as by the education department at Our Lady of the Lake University as one of OLLU's Professional Development Schools where preservice students are placed for early field-based experiences.

Our Lady of the Lake University, also located in inner city San Antonio and one block from Rodriguez Elementary School, is a small, private, Catholic university with a total student population of approximately 3000 students. The Catholic principles and philosophy that led to Our Lady of the Lake's founding in 1895 remain the guiding force for its present mission, strategic planning, and continued evolution to meet the needs of at-

risk students from diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds, geographic regions, and economic conditions. The University's sustained growth and record of achievement by its alumni, students, faculty, and staff are attributable to its insistence on academic excellence and efforts to serve groups whose needs were underserved or ignored. The majority of students that attend OLLU are nontraditional, Hispanic, first-generation college students.

In a good many respects, the Rodriguez Mentoring Program is a collaborative effort with the bulk of the planning and implementation being guided by the expertise of the full time counselor assigned to Rodriguez Elementary School whose position is funded by the state grant and the director of the campus ministry program at Our Lady of the Lake University.

During the first year of the mentoring program, only a few university students volunteered to serve as mentors; however, in 1993-94 the program had grown to over 130 university students serving as mentors. Because of this dramatic growth, many of the 370 students at Rodriguez Elementary now have mentors. However, many of the students who have not received mentors are requesting them.

Mentors

Perspective volunteers for the program are actively recruited from all university students. In addition, several courses at the university provide opportunities for students to participate in the mentor program as part of the course requirements. Screening of these students occurs through the campus ministry office. Careful checks of criminal records and a personal interview are required of all students wishing to be mentors. Each mentor completes a questionnaire giving his\her preference for grade level and gender of an elementary student and a list of the mentor's special interests or talents which the school counselor uses to match the mentor with an elementary student. Individuals who are interested in mentoring and who pass the screening process are assigned a student to mentor.

An orientation meeting prior to mentors beginning the mentoring process is required. Because of the nature of mentoring, it means that those involved as mentors are often told very private and often disturbing information by the students. This knowledge can lead to a conflict between the demands of the mentor's responsibility to safeguard the student's trust and the mentor's responsibility to report information to school personnel. An important part of the orientation is explaining to the university students how to handle sensitive situations where students reveal private information.

The university students spend one hour a week with their elementary students as their friend, mentor, and confidant. The mentors must sign in when they arrive at the school, and badges are worn to identify the mentors. The mentors take the students out of the regular classroom routine in order to spend time with them. The parent or guardian must give written permission for his\her child to participate in the mentor program.

During the mentoring sessions, mentors do a variety of activities such as reading to their students, taking them to the university, playing games, walking outside, or just talking. Field trips are allowed after a trusting relationship is established between the mentor and the student. While the mentors can help students with academics, the mentoring program is not to be used as a tutorial program. Teachers of the students involved in the program and the mentors communicate on a regular basis to provide each other with strategies to help meet the needs of the students.

Mentors have the opportunity throughout the year to share their experiences. Monthly meetings involving mentors are held at the university. These meetings include activities such as planning and sharing sessions, guest speakers, and announcements of upcoming events. Social activities involving the university students, elementary students, and parents occur throughout the school year. Some of these activities have included an ice cream social, school programs, report card pick-up days, fund-raising activities for a trip to Sea World, and a trip to Sea World.

Building Self-Esteem

Since the mentor program was originally established as a program for building self-esteem, a continual planning, modification, and revision process is occurring to ensure that the impact of the mentoring program on the students' self concept is positive. As a requirement of the state grant, evaluation is an important component of the Rodriguez Elementary Mentoring Program. Utilizing a one group pretest-posttest design, the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale (PHCSCS) was administered to the elementary students involved in the mentoring program in the Fall of 1993 and again in the Spring of 1994. The PHCSCS is an 80-item group-administered, self-report inventory that indicates the amount of change in a student's self-concept. A positive amount of change indicates that the post test score was higher than the pre-test score, while a negative amount of change indicates that the pre-test score was higher. A positive difference of 10 signifiers a significant change in a student's self-concept. Table 1 gives the results of the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale. Informal teacher evaluations and mentor evaluations of the program are also collected.

Table 1
Results of the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale

Rodriguez Elementary	Mean Difference	SD	N
Overall	3.02	16.6	136
Third Grade	8.25	18.2	48
Fourth Grade	1.02	11.8	43
Fifth Grade	-0.62	17.5	45

While the results of the Piers-Harris were not statistically significant, the results do indicate a trend in the data which suggests a positive change in the students' self-concept. The third grade at Rodriguez had the largest amount of change (8.25), although it was not significant. Data collected over the first three years of the mentoring program from the teachers' and mentors' evaluations also reflects this positive change and indicates that the collaborative mentoring program between Rodriquez Elementary and Our Lady of the Lake University is having a positive effect on the students' self-esteem. Based on the experience of implementing the mentor program and the nature of these results, it is accurate to say that the Rodriguez Mentoring Program has achieved much success, with many benefits for the students and mentors.

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